



Mohegan Sun casino proposal in Palmer to be subject of public forum



By [Conor Berry, The Republican](#)

on February 12, 2013 at 3:30 PM

[PALMER](#) — A meeting date has been set, but the venue is still up in the air, for what Palmer officials are hoping will be a comprehensive update from [Mohegan Sun](#) about plans for a luxury resort casino off Route 32.

The public forum is tentatively scheduled for 7 p.m. March 4, but town and Mohegan Sun officials have yet to settle on a location large enough to accommodate the crowd that might show up.

Local officials and members of the public are clamoring for more information about the \$600 million proposal by the Connecticut-based [Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority](#), among the earliest contenders for the state's sole casino license for Western Massachusetts. Since gaining an early foothold in the region by opening an office in downtown Palmer, Mohegan officials have been short on specifics. Now, however, casino supporters and critics alike are yearning for details.

"I have lots of questions for them," Palmer Town Councilor [Donald Blais](#) Jr. said at Monday's Town Council meeting.

At-large Councilor [Jason Polonsky](#) said since Mohegan officials ponied up a non-refundable \$400,000 state application fee last month, they've spoken at a chamber of commerce luncheon in Amherst and last week were expected to participate in a [MassLive.com question-and-answer session](#) that was postponed due to a scheduling conflict.

"But, they've yet to come to Palmer to discuss their plan," Polonsky said.

Mohegan officials have held past public events in Palmer.

Town Manager [Charles T. Blanchard](#) said the good news is casino officials are expected to reveal more about the scope of the project at next month's forum, which is still being arranged.

"They're willing to have it in a larger venue," he told the [Town Council](#) on Monday, adding that possible host locations might include the library's meeting room or a local school auditorium. "We'll pick a site and let you know," he told councilors.

The Mohegan Sun plan calls for building a casino on 152 acres bordering Thorndike Street (Route 32) across from the Massachusetts Turnpike toll plaza. The casino would create 2,500 to 3,000 permanent jobs, 1,000 to 1,200 construction jobs and more than 2,500 indirect jobs, according to Mohegan officials, who've yet to provide specifics about the size of the facility, traffic issues and other project details.

The land in question – four undeveloped parcels totaling 152.5 acres worth \$3.7 million, according to the Palmer [assessor's online database](#) – is owned by Northeast Realty Associates LLC, which is leasing the property to the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority. The casino company is footing the tax bills for the parcels, including 115.67 acres valued at \$2,955,900, 14.14 acres at \$103,300, 12.85 acres at \$80,700, and 9.84 acres worth \$600,200. The land is bounded on the west and north by Thorndike Street, on the east by Breckenridge Street, and on the south by another large undeveloped parcel.

[Jennifer Baruffaldi](#), spokeswoman for [Citizens for Jobs and Growth in Palmer](#), said she's excited to learn more about the project. The pro-casino group has also [sent an invitation](#) to Mohegan officials to address the organization, but a meeting date hasn't been set.

"We're still working out the details," Baruffaldi said, adding that she's "delighted" the town is arranging a public information forum.

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